

**How can I use theatre to
communicate the story of
Tutankhamun to an audience of
nine to ten-year-olds?**

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Abstract

This project explores the benefits of using theatre as an aid within primary school education. It relates the process of writing and performing an educational play for a target audience of nine and ten-year-olds, about the Ancient Egyptian pharaoh, Tutankhamun. The elements explored include research into cognitive development - focusing on the work of Jean Piaget – as well as the language level of the target audience. Considerations when it came to educational content about Tutankhamun are also explained, as are effective techniques that can be included in a play for children. The project is evaluated using feedback from the audience of Year 5 children, their class teacher and the actors in the play, and reaches the conclusion that theatre is extremely beneficial as a reinforcement of children's learning.

Contents page

Introduction and background	6
The inspiration behind my project	6
The development of my title	7
Overview	8
The benefits of using theatre as an aid for teaching children	8
Tutankhamun: the Boy King	9
Information included in the play	9
Tutankhamun's life	9
Tutankhamun's death	11
Akhenaten and the change in religion	11
Mummification	12
The excavation of Tutankhamun's tomb	12
Tutankhamun's curse	13
Information not included in the play	13
Writing and performing for a young audience	15
Cognitive development	15
Level of language and delivery	16
Advice and feedback	17
Important aspects to consider when performing for a young audience	17
Rate of speech	18
Audience participation	18
Slapstick humour	18

Responses	19
Audience response	19
Actor's response	20
Teacher's response	20
Personal response, conclusion	21
Evaluation	22
Appendices	23
Bibliography	24

Introduction and background

The inspiration behind my project

Whilst I was still in primary school I remember that every so often the teacher, instead of initiating a usual morning of literacy and numeracy, would usher our class into the school hall. We'd sit in our seats, anticipating excitedly the reason for a morning of no lessons. Then, all of a sudden, a number of people who we'd never seen before would appear in front of us, and begin to entertain us in the form of a play. The performance would always be enjoyable: there would be jokes, slapstick comedy, audience participation and storytelling, and the whole class would leave the hall at the end, invigorated and entertained. What was probably not realised at the time was that we would also leave knowing a lot more about a subject than we had known when we'd arrived. Subconsciously, through the stimulation of each of our imaginations, the play will have tapped into our store of knowledge, and distributed a number of facts that we will remember for a long time afterwards.

I myself can trace my love for drama back to primary school, where I was involved in many plays, presentations and concerts that were performed to parents, or to other year groups. What also inspired me was watching others perform. Since then, I have had a great passion for the subject, and have been involved in many productions, taking every opportunity to perform to different groups of people. Based on my own experience, I believe that what children experience at a young age can affect greatly their passions in later life. This was partly what led me to my chosen task for this project: to write a play to be performed to primary school children that will entertain and inspire them, as well as enhance their learning in a topic they are studying in lessons.

During my GCSE drama course, I completed a unit entitled 'Theatre in Education', which involved performing a play as with the whole of my GCSE group, to a class of primary school children. I enjoyed this unit greatly, and was given an immense feeling of satisfaction that I had entertained the children as well as contributing to their learning. The Extended Project has given me an opportunity to repeat this experience. This time, however, I undertook the responsibility of writing, producing and directing the play myself.

The development of my title

My first port of call was my old primary school, St Mary's Catholic Primary: I felt I wanted to give something back to the school that had inspired my love for drama so much. The school were enthusiastic about the idea of the play, and suggested I write a play for a year 5 class of nine to ten year olds, about their history topic: the Ancient Egyptians. I had originally wanted to write for the 7-8 age group, as I had an opinion that this was a good age for children to be able to appreciate and enjoy the play whilst still retaining valuable knowledge. However, after the school suggested the topic of the Ancient Egyptians, I began to develop many ideas for plays on this subject, and I realised that the school had offered me a perfect stimulus for a play. I therefore accepted the challenge.

Then came the task of deciding a smaller topic to focus on during the play. The Ancient Egyptians spanned centuries, and there are many aspects of the civilisation that could be researched and written about, meaning I had to think very carefully about what I wanted to base my play on. The Key Stage Two National Curriculum specifies certain topics that should be taught during 'a world study of a past society' (National Curriculum, 1999). I wanted to write a play that would include as many of these topics as possible, in order to provide information relating to the topic of the Ancient Egyptians as a whole and not just one aspect.

I remembered that, when I was younger, I read a book in class about the Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamun. I recalled being captivated by the mystery of the famous pharaoh's death, as well as his alleged curse. I realised that, by writing a play about Tutankhamun, I could fulfil my aim of incorporating as much relevant information as possible, because I could tie into the story of Tutankhamun facts that came under many of the major topic titles that were suggested by the National Curriculum: 'rulers and ruled; beliefs, customs and legends, gods and goddesses; temples and tombs' (National Curriculum, 1999). Consequently, I began to think about how the young pharaoh's story could be told in the form of a play, leading to my project title: How can I use theatre to communicate the story of Tutankhamun to an audience of nine to ten-year-olds?

Overview

During this essay, I aim to first of all explain the benefits of using theatre as a teaching aid for children. I will then go on to explain my research about Tutankhamun, and how I took certain historical facts and put them into the play in ways that would ensure that an audience of nine and ten-year-olds would understand their significance to the story. I also aim to explain the different aspects that have to be considered when writing and performing for a young audience, and how I looked for feedback about how successful I had been in doing so. Finally, I will evaluate how successful my whole project has been, and the reasons for this.

The benefits of using theatre as an aid for teaching children

Albert Einstein once said: “Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand.” Therefore, taking this view, what better way to teach children than by stimulating their imagination and taking them on a journey in the form of a play, whilst also imparting valuable knowledge, something that will probably never occur when copying facts down from the board? Such, in my opinion, is the wonder of using theatre as an aid to teach children.

The Key Stage Two National Curriculum states that during history lessons, pupils ‘should be taught how to find out about the events, people and changes studied from an appropriate range of sources of information’ (National Curriculum, 1999). By presenting historical facts to children in the form of a play, this provides another source of information for them to draw knowledge from.

It can obviously be argued that not all children respond to the same method of teaching, due to the fact that people learn in different ways, according to various learning styles. However, in research by Jackson, A. and Rees Leahy, H. at the University of Manchester, published in volume 10 of issue 3 of *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, in November 2005, the abstract of an investigation reported the results of a study that had taken place looking at ‘the practice and impact of museum

theatre at two UK museums' (Informaworld, 2009). It was found that 'the incorporation of performance alongside other more traditional approaches, demonstrably improved children's grasp of the personal stories associated with, but not always explicit in, the museum collections and displays, and created strong and memorable resonances still evident several months after the visit.' Therefore, the research concluded that 'theatre can offer a significant enhancement to learning by children of this age.' Drawing from this investigation, it can be said that a play, alongside other sources of learning, is a very effective way of teaching children about the past.

Therefore, it is easy to see that using theatre as a way of teaching children is an advantage because as well as complying with the National Curriculum requirements, it also provides enhancement for a child's learning.

Tutankhamun: the Boy King

Information included in the play

As previously stated, I wanted to include as much information in my play as possible relating to the subject of the Ancient Egyptians. However, I also wanted to tell the story of Tutankhamun in a light-hearted way so that the audience would enjoy the play as well as gain knowledge from it. The information that I eventually used in the play can be summarised under several headings.

Tutankhamun's life

The main part of the final draft of the play is an account of the life of Tutankhamun, from his birth in approximately 1345 BC (Egyptology Online, 2001), to his death around eighteen years later (The Tutankhamun Exhibition, 2008). The inclusion of the year of his birth, and the explanation that this is '1345 years before Jesus was born' complies with the requirement of the National Curriculum that pupils should be able to 'use dates and vocabulary relating to the passing of time, including ancient, modern, BC, AD, century and decade' (National Curriculum, 1999). Therefore, this piece of information was included in the play to further the audience's understanding of when specific events occurred in relation to each other, which is an essential skill to teach young children.

It is claimed in the play that Tutankhaten – as he was originally named (The Tutankhamun Exhibition, 2008) – enjoyed playing ‘lots of games’ when growing up and that ‘his favourite was chariot racing’. This description was accompanied by two of the actors mimicking the galloping of horses, whilst another actor created the movement of the chariot by moving a chair up and down. The final actor sat on the chair and pretended to take hold of the reins. This information was included as a way of getting the young audience to relate to the character of the boy king, and to see him as a child the same age, who would have played and been active like themselves. This would then help them to understand more easily the age and situation of the young boy, especially as Tutankhamun was being played by a much older actor. Although not much is known about Tutankhamun’s everyday life, it is could be assumed that chariot racing and hunting were favourite sports of his, due to the many depictions of the Pharaoh riding a chariot on numerous artefacts within the tomb, as well as two personalised ‘state chariots’ that were dismantled and placed ‘just inside the Antechamber’ (Edwards, I.E.S., 1976).



(Griffith Institute, 2009.)



(Tour Egypt, 1996-2005.)

Another aspect of Tutankhamun’s life to be explored within the play is his escalation to the throne of Egypt at nine years of age in 1336 BC (Egyptology Online, 2001-2008). In actual fact, there are many conflicting sources when it comes to any dates concerned with Tutankhamun’s life, due to the fact that no historians can place his birth on an exact date in an exact year. Therefore, when determining which dates to include in the play, the most reliable sources were chosen, namely information from official Egyptology websites.

Tutankhamun's death

Perhaps the most intriguing part of Tutankhamun's story is his death in mysterious circumstances. As explained within the play, 'no one really knows how Tutankhamun died'. Therefore, this gave an excellent opportunity for me to include elements of a murder mystery in the play, shown through the use of the detective. In the play, two possible causes of death are suggested. The first is that 'Tutankhamun was chariot racing, and he fell off his chariot, hit his head and died.' This possible cause of death is based on the finding of 'a dense spot at the lower back of the skull' (Egyptology Online, 2001-2008). This source explains that this spot 'had been interpreted as a chronic subdural hematoma, which would have been caused by a blow' to the head. The source also suggests that this injury 'could have been the result of an accident', so I saw this as an opportunity to bring back the chariot motif, but this time have Tutankhamun fall off the chair onto the floor to show his death. By repeating the same motif as previously used, and by changing suddenly in one swift movement, this helped to convey to the audience the shock and suddenness of the young Pharaoh's death.

The second possible cause of death explained in the play is that Tutankhamun's advisers 'hit him on the head and killed him' after Tutankhamun attempted to make changes to the Egyptian religion. In the play, Tutankhamun's advisers represent 'Egypt's military leader, Ay, who effectively ran the country.' (The Search for Tutankhamun, 2005). Ay was not included as a named character in play simply because there were already many names of Gods and Pharaohs included, and there was a danger of this becoming too confusing for the audience. Therefore, Ay took the form of the advisers, who are described in the play as 'the people who told King Tutankhaten what to do.' Egyptology Online suggests that Ay, Tutankhamun's 'immediate successor' is a 'popular candidate' for the murder of the Pharaoh. Therefore, in the play, the advisers are shown hitting Tutankhamun on the back of his head and causing his death.

Akhenaten and the change in religion

As explained in the play, some records suggest that Tutankhamun was the son of the 'heretic' Pharaoh Akhenaten, although there are theories that Akhenaten was

Tutankhamun's half-brother (The Tutankhamun Exhibition, 2008). Nevertheless, when Tutankhamun became Pharaoh, much expectation surrounded him to return Egypt to its previous glory (The Search for Tutankhamun, 2005). As explained on the Tutankhamun Exhibition website, this was due to Akhenaten's rejection of the religion of Amun: he banned the worship of the traditional Egyptian Gods, replacing them with just one - the Aten (or the sun-disc) and moving the Egyptian capital from Thebes to Akhetaten (the horizon of the Aten). The pupils explain within the play that 'when Akhenaten died, the advisers saw their chance to go back to their old religion' (the religion of Amun), which is exactly what happened: the Tutankhamun Exhibition explains that 'during the third year of Tutankhamun's reign the court re-established itself again at Thebes, where the young king was crowned.' This source also explains the change of the Pharaoh's name from Tutankhaten to Tutankhamun as a result of the change of religion, something that is shown in the play.

Mummification

As explained previously, my aim was to include as much information about the Egyptians as possible, through the story of Tutankhamun. Therefore, I used the retelling of Tutankhamun's death as a means to explain the process of mummification, the Egyptian embalming ritual. As described in the play, the process of mummification involved wrapping a body in strips of linen, in order to preserve it for the afterlife (The British Museum, 1999). The process of removing the brain and other internal organs (all except the heart), and placing them into jars called canopic jars that were buried with the body (The British Museum, 2009) is also described.

The excavation of Tutankhamun's tomb

The discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922 (Cottrell, L., 1965) is portrayed in the play through the use of glove puppets that represent Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon. Howard Carter explains to the audience that Lord Carnarvon has 'given (him) money to look for Tutankhamun's tomb'. Cottrell confirms in his book that Carnarvon was an 'English aristocrat to whom Egyptology was a hobby', and that 'Howard Carter was 'assigned' to Lord Carnarvon' to conduct archaeological digs, which 'Carnarvon financed'. In the play, the Howard Carter puppet remarks that he has 'been looking for this tomb for ages', which is very true: Carter had conducted a number of digs in previous years, to no avail (The Search for Tutankhamun, 2005).

Once the puppets have been helped by the audience to find the tomb, Carter looks inside, and the brief exchange that the puppets share at this moment –

‘CANARVON: Can you see anything?’

CARTER: Yes... wonderful things...’

– is in fact the exact dialogue shared between the two men on the opening of the tomb, recorded by Carter in his account of the discovery (Cottrell, L., 1965).

Tutankhamun’s ‘curse’

An intriguing (and some may argue ridiculous) part of the story of Tutankhamun, is the theory of his curse. As explained by a pupil in the play, ‘lots of people say that, before the ancient Egyptians closed the tomb after they buried Tutankhamun, they put a curse on it, so that if anyone broke into the tomb, they’d be punished for it.’ He explains that not long after the opening of the tomb, Lord Carnarvon died after contracting malaria from a mosquito bite, and that at the same moment his dog back in England howled and died, and all the lights went out in Cairo (Rigby’s World of Egypt, 2000). To highlight the disagreement about whether there was in fact a curse or not, the audience are invited to vote for or against the existence of Tutankhamun’s curse. This also fulfils a requirement of the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum: that ‘pupils should be taught to recognise that the past is represented and interpreted in different ways’ (National Curriculum, 1999).

Information not included in the play

The story of Tutankhamun is a complicated and ongoing one. Therefore, there were many parts of his story that were left out of the play, either for dramatic license, or for the reason that I did not want to make the play any more complicated than it needed to be, considering the age of the audience. There was also the case of conflicting sources, and the fact that I did not want to risk including anything that may have been untrue.

An example of a piece of information that was left out of the play, was Tutankhamun’s marriage to his half-sister Ankhesenpaaten (who later changed her name to Ankhesenamun) in order to secure his position (The Tutankhamun Exhibition, 2008). I decided against including this piece of information for the same reason that I did not include

the character of Ay: there were already many names being discussed in the play (Akhenaten, Tutankhaten, Tutankhamun, Amun and Aten), and I felt that including yet more names would begin to confuse the audience.

Another piece of Tutankhamun's story that was omitted from the play concerns his cause of death. Egyptology Online (2001-2008) describes a CT scan of Tutankhamun's mummy, which took place on the 5th January 2005. The source explains that the images from the scan showed 'no signs of a blow to the head, as had been theorised based on the x-rays taken in 1968, and no other evidence for foul play.' This would therefore cause the theory of Tutankhamun's murder, included in the play, to be invalid. However, another source (The Tutankhamun Exhibition, 2008) claims that Tutankhamun's head wound 'shows some signs of healing' and that 'it now seems probable that this healing could have taken place while Tutankhamun was in a coma, and that the blow was sufficient to have killed him'. The source concludes by saying that 'whether the blow was sustained by accident or by intent cannot be proved.' These conflicting sources proved a problem during the writing of the play, because I wanted to ensure that the facts within were valid. In the end, I concluded that the second source was probably more reliable than the first, due to the fact that it was created to accompany an official exhibition of replicas of the artefacts found in Tutankhamun's tomb. Also, I liked the idea of including an element of murder-mystery in the play, simply for dramatic effect. Therefore, for these reasons I chose to leave the possibility of Tutankhamun's murder open to the imaginations of the young audience. The problem of conflicting sources was also included in the play through Miss Sphinx's line: 'The problem is, no one knows for sure why Tutankhamun died when he was so young. But that doesn't mean you can't have your own theory about it! That's the fun thing about history – as long as you can think of good reasons, you can make any point you want!' This line also helps the audience understand that history can be interpreted in different ways, which, as explained previously, is a requirement of the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum (1999).

Writing and performing for a young audience

Obviously, when writing and performing for a young audience, the most important thing to remember is that the audience need to follow the events that occur within the play. In order to write for an audience of nine and ten-year-olds, it is therefore important to understand

what stage they are at in their mental development, as well as the level of language that they are capable of understanding: without knowing this, there is a danger of writing a play which loses the audience's concentration in the first scene. Therefore, before writing my play, I researched the cognitive development and language acquisition of nine-to-ten-year-olds. I also researched the different aspects that should be considered when performing for children.

Cognitive development

The Theory of Cognitive Development was developed by Jean Piaget, a Swiss philosopher and natural scientist (Wikipedia, 2009). After extensive experiments, Piaget came up with the four stages of cognitive development which are as follows:

- Sensorimotor period (years 0–2)
- Preoperational period (years 2–7)
- Concrete operational period (years 7–11)
- Formal operational period (years 12 and up)

(Wikipedia, 2009)

According to this theory, the audience of the play would currently be in the 'concrete operational period'. It is claimed that, at this stage in their development, children 'can think logically about ideas and events' (Learning and Teaching, 2005). This meant that I would not have to worry about the audience not understanding the sequence of events that spanned more than 3000 years, from Tutankhamun's birth, to the excavation of his tomb. However, there were other aspects of this developmental stage that caused me to think more carefully about how I presented certain events within the play.

In his book, *A Level Psychology Through Diagrams*, Hill, G. (2001) explains that, at the concrete operational level, 'mental operations cannot be carried out purely in the child's head – the physical (concrete) presence of the objects being manipulated is needed... the child needs to see the transformation taking place.' This made me think about certain changes that occur within Tutankhamun's story that might be hard for nine and ten-year-olds to understand. I thought about Akhenaten and the change in religion, and realised that without visual aids, the constant changing from Amun to Aten and back again might have been difficult for the audience to grasp. Therefore, with this information, I was able to devise a way of showing the change in Religion through the use of a freeze frame and a

sign: one actor stands with a sign round his neck reading 'we ♥ the Religion of Amun', whilst two others stand on either side of him in an Egyptian pose, facing away from him. When the time comes for the change of religion, Akhenaten clicks his fingers, the actor in the centre flips the sign around to read 'we ♥ the Aten', and the two either side turn to face him. This sign is used twice more in the play, to show the religion changing back and forth. Another aspect of the play for which visual representation of change is shown is the changing of Tutankhamun's name. When he is 'born', the actor playing him is given a sticker reading 'Tutankhaten'. He is later given a sticker reading 'Tutankhamun', when the religion is restored.

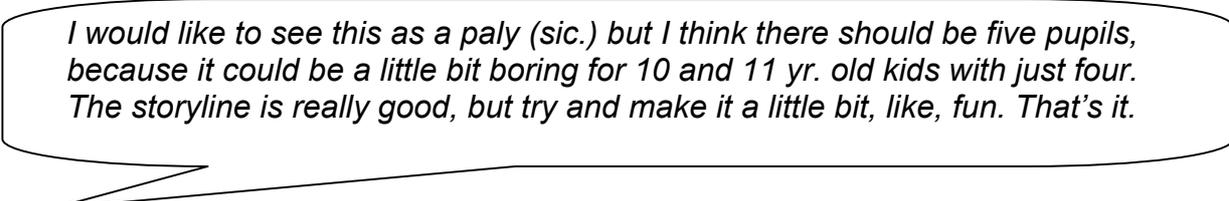
To summarise, knowing what level of cognitive development the audience were at, and understanding what techniques to include in order to ensure that they followed the story, was extremely useful. Without understanding cognitive development, I was in danger of producing a play that was too mentally challenging for the target audience.

Level of language and delivery

Another important factor to consider when writing my play was the level of language to use. Therefore, research into communication with the target age group was important. The Nemours Foundation Kid's Health website (1995-2009), in the article 'Communication and your 6-to-12-year-old, states that 'as kids progress in school, their comprehension and use of language will become more sophisticated.' This suggested to me that, because nine and ten-year-olds are in the middle of this age group, they would have a relatively sound vocabulary. The article also states that 'usually, kids will understand more vocabulary words and concepts than they may be able to express'. This was useful to know because I realised that if I had written a play using the same level of language with which they spoke, it could have been too simplistic. Knowing this, it gave me more freedom to include more complex ideas and language within the play, without having to worry that the audience's comprehension of the story might be jeopardised. For this reason, it was at this moment when I realised that writing for seven and eight-year olds, my originally intended target audience, would have proved a lot more difficult than writing for nine and ten-year-olds.

Advice and feedback

As part of my research into theatre for children, I contacted the Egg Theatre in Bath. The Egg theatre specialises in children's theatre and I was confident that they could give me advice on writing for my target audience. After writing to the theatre, I received a reply from a representative, who explained that '(the Egg's) experience is that the more you ask children and young people (rather than guessing) the better the chance of creating something appropriate.' Therefore, following this advice, I sent the first few pages of my script, during which the pupils arrive at school and meet Miss Sphinx, the supply teacher, to a ten-year-old girl who would be watching the play when it was performed to the class. She gave me this feedback:



I would like to see this as a paly (sic.) but I think there should be five pupils, because it could be a little bit boring for 10 and 11 yr. old kids with just four. The storyline is really good, but try and make it a little bit, like, fun. That's it.

Unfortunately, due to the fact that I could only find a certain number of people who were able to act in the play, I had to keep the number of pupils in the play the same. However, after reading the girl's comments, I was able to understand that the first part of the play was slightly unimaginative. Therefore, when working with the actors, I was able to add in more interesting touches to this scene through the use of movement. Also, when writing the rest of the play, I was able to add in more 'fun' parts to the play, as well as factual, for example when the pupils wrap each other up in bandages, as well as the puppet show in the middle.

Overall, having this feedback from a child was extremely helpful, because it helped me see the play from my target audience's perspective, meaning I could make changes accordingly.

Important aspects to consider when performing for a young audience

Whilst conducting my research into performing for young audiences, I came across a website entitled KMR Scripts (1997), in which Reese, KM., an apparently experienced playwright and performer in theatre for children, gave 'Tips on Performing for Child & Family Audiences'. At first, I wasn't sure of the reliability of this source, and whether the tips could be counted upon to produce a successful play. However, after reading through the article, I realised that many of the points made tied in with the feedback that I had been

given from the ten-year-old. I also concluded that, due to my own knowledge of performing for children which I picked up during my drama GCSE, the information was extremely useful and relevant, and explored many aspects of children's theatre that I had not thought of, or did not know much about, which I subsequently went on to use within my own production.

Rate of speech

This was a factor that I had not considered prior to reading the tips on the aforementioned website. The article mentions a study that was conducted about rate of speech and understanding. Unsure of the reliability of the source, and wanting to know more, I researched this study and found an article on a website (Dyslexia Tutor: News-Resources, n.d.) entitled 'Speak More Slowly to Your Students, Says Audiology Professor'. The article explains that the 'average adult speaks at a rate of almost 170 words per minute, while the average 5- to 7-year-old processes speech at a rate of only 120 words per minute.' This meant that my target age group processed speech at a rate of slightly over 120 words per minute. Therefore, with this knowledge, I was able to forewarn the other actors of the importance of speaking slowly and clearly, so that the audience could understand the story.

Audience participation

Reese also explains that 'audience participation is good for checking retention and reinforcement', so there were many points throughout the play in which the audience could share their knowledge with or help the actors, namely the point at which the Howard Carter puppet asks for the audience's assistance in finding the tomb of Tutankhamun. Reese comments: '...listen to (the children's) responses – you may be impressed.' This was certainly the case during the performance of our play – a boy told us the name of an Egyptian Pharaoh that none of us had ever heard of before!

Slapstick humour

According to Reese's experience, 'children love slapstick' which 'consists of one-liners and puns' as well as 'physical humor.' In my play, there were many one-liners from the various pupils, as well as physical humour, for example two of the pupils carrying another, and dropping him by accident, and the mummy-wrapping incident. These

were important to include because of the ten-year-old girl's feedback – that there needed to be more 'fun' involved in the play.

In conclusion, these tips were extremely helpful to me when writing the play because they either reinforced my own knowledge of performing to children, or introduced new ideas that I was able to use, with extremely effective results.

Responses

Audience response

When the play was performed, the audience reacted to it wonderfully, eagerly joining in at all the correct moments. They were extremely enthusiastic about the performance when I spoke to them afterwards. Below are some of the comments they made about what they enjoyed in the play.

"I liked the chariot racing."

"I liked the way he clicked and the music went on."

"I liked the dance."

"I liked it when they wrapped Alex up in bandages."

"I liked it when they hit Alex on the head!"

All of these comments show appreciation of the slapstick humour, and the physical theatre that were included for the entertainment of the audience, so I was extremely pleased to hear that they enjoyed these aspects. Nevertheless, I was interested to know whether there were any parts that the children thought could have been improved. Their comments are below.

"The puppet show could have been improved and made a bit better."

"Yeah, the tomb could have been more hidden."

"And maybe a bit bigger."

In hindsight, the box used for the tomb could have been a bit larger, and I could have made the fact that it was the tomb less obvious: I think I may have underestimated the children's intuition by making it too obvious, and if the play were to be performed again, I would definitely consider taking these comments into account.

Actors' response

The four actors who performed the play with me enjoyed their experience immensely. Some of their comments on rehearsing and performing are included below.

I really enjoyed doing the play for Fiona's extended project. It was all hugely fun, the practicing and the performing. I volunteered to be involved in the play and I am very glad that I did. I enjoyed working with everyone in the rehearsals, and I liked all the practicing because I'm not doing drama any more and I miss it. I also learnt a lot about Tutankhamun!! I think the play was very well written. It was a clever idea to have it set as a classroom with the actors switching character from pupils to ancient Egyptians. I liked the way the audience was involved, and they seemed to enjoy it as well because they were all participating. It meant that as an actor I was able to interact with them much more than you often can. Isla

In our rehearsal period for the play, Fiona used an effective and enjoyable technique of going through and setting the script, but at the same time letting each of us have some freedom it. I think this worked well because it created more opportunities of comic moments and interaction with the audience, which there wouldn't have been if she had used a very strict staging method. For all of us, we were able to experiment with timing, movements and characteristics to see what worked best for the performance as whole, but through it all she still managed to have a leadership role. This was key because using all the parts we experimented with, she channelled it into an entertaining but still educational production. Laura

Overall, I was very glad that the performers enjoyed the whole process of rehearsing (see *Appendix 1*) and performing the play, and I was really impressed with their commitment to the project, and their enthusiasm during the performance.

Teacher's response

Although the comments I received from the children were very positive, I noticed that they only focused on the entertainment factor of the play. I wanted to know how successful I had been from an educational point of view, so I asked the Year 5 teacher for feedback after the play had been performed. His comments are below.

This was a delightful play, which really reinforced their (the children's) learning on the subject of Tutankhamun. We're always telling the pupils about the importance of projecting their voices to fill the space they are performing in, and all of the actors had very good projection. They also kept acting, even when it wasn't their line.

I was particularly pleased to hear this piece of feedback because it confirmed that I had done what I set out to do: to successfully enrich the pupils learning in their history topic. However, it was also good to hear that we, as actors, had helped the children in another way too, by demonstrating key performance skills. I felt this was especially appropriate, as I myself had started to develop these skills when I was at the very same school.

(For additional feedback, see *Appendix 2*)

Personal response and conclusion

In conclusion, after seeing the children laughing and joining in with the play when it was performed, I believe that the most important thing to remember when relating information to children through theatre is that a play is performed primarily to be enjoyed. This is what sets it apart from normal lessons. If children are enjoying a play, they are more likely to listen to what the performers are saying, and only then can they learn.

Therefore, what the play includes, and how the performers interact with the audience, is vital. I believe after my experience of this project, that there are three fundamental areas in which to concentrate when writing and performing for young children:

- **Correct choice of performers** – I was lucky enough to have chosen performers who engaged well with the audience, meaning the audience were able to feel more involved in the play
- **Balance of fact and entertainment** – If the audience are enjoying the play and finding it entertaining, they are more likely to listen and retain the facts that are included in the play
- **Presenting more difficult themes in a variety of ways** – As I discovered when researching cognitive development, there are certain aspects in history, and in other subjects, that may be hard for a young audience to understand. If creative methods are used to show these more difficult themes, then the audience are more likely to understand

Aside from academic research into the subject, I can conclude through my own experience during this project that theatre is an extremely successful method of teaching children. The children's own comments told me that they had enjoyed the performance immensely, whilst

their teacher's feedback confirmed that the play had 'reinforced their learning' and contributed towards their education not just in history, but in drama too.

Evaluation

Writing and performing this play was probably one of the most rewarding things I have ever done. I have learnt a great deal along the way, not just about the Ancient Egyptians and Tutankhamun, but also about myself. One year ago, I never would have thought that I had the ability to write, produce and direct a play myself, but now I've done so, I feel immensely proud of my achievements and the new skills I have developed. I have become more confident in my managing of people and in my communication skills, and I have explored in depth a whole new area of drama. It was a wonderful feeling to have learnt so much myself whilst at the same time helping the young audience to learn more about the Egyptians. My love for drama having sprung from my experiences at St Mary's, I feel as if I have gone full circle, and really given back to the school that gave me so much.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Photographs from play rehearsals



Appendix 2

Additional feedback from the performance of the play

“It was a wonderfully satisfying feeling to perform in front of the children; they seemed to really appreciate and enjoy the play. During rehearsal I think it is fair to say we went through a period of doubt; we were unsure of whether the play would reach its objective, which was to teach them about the life and death of Tutankhamun, in a way in which they could enjoy and relate to. However, looking back, creating it was a tremendously enjoyable experience for which I am grateful, and seeing it being run through without failure in front of an enthusiastic audience was even greater. Also, I am ashamed to say, now my own knowledge of Tutankhamun has been stretched from just knowing about the fact that he died when he was very young!” **Alex, another performer.**

I enjoyed the play; I thought it was well suited to the age you were aiming for. It seemed as though you were well rehearsed, but what I think was most important/enjoyable was the attention to detail, i.e. the facts quoted; eg. 1345 years before Jesus, artefacts from the tomb kept in museums around world etc. These types of facts were never included in plays I saw in primary school so I thought that that aspect was good - fun but educational! **Joe, a member of the Extended Project group, who watched the performance.**

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